
Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: Prospects for a Predictive Paradigmⁱ

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The term ‘fundamentalism’, broadly speaking, names today a religio-political perspective found in many if not all major religions in the contemporary world. Most disturbingly, it is associated with variant forms of religious extremism and thus religiously-oriented terrorism, in particular – though by no means exclusively – that of an Islamic ilk. Movements of a fundamentalist type are evident in Islam, certainly, but they may be found also in Christianity, in Hinduism, in Judaism and other religious communities. Contemporary fundamentalism is not the sole province of any one religion. And an upsurge in the totalising claims of fundamentalist ideologues, of whatever religion, together with the utilisation of globalized communication, transportation and related modern technologies, means that the issue of religious fundamentalism itself requires, once again, some careful attention.ⁱⁱ Although both Christianity and Islam are susceptible to imperialist impositions of one sort or another, as history only too clearly has demonstrated, it is nonetheless the case that Islamic modalities of terrorism have presently taken centre-stage in current world affairs. However, the religious fundamentalism with which Islamist extremism is associated arguably follows an identifiable paradigm that has a wider purview.

Given the pressing need to be able to identify, predict, locate and so counter any potential terrorising extremism born of certain expressions of religion, then the task of analysing the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism so as to construct a heuristic paradigm capable of providing a measure of predictability would seem both obvious and urgent. In this paper I shall explore the nature of fundamentalism as such, examine fundamentalism and also terrorism in respect to Islam, then outline a paradigm of fundamentalism that, I contend, could enable the development of a predictive capability in respect to identifying genuine possibilities for religious extremism and terrorism.

I suggest that ‘religious fundamentalism’ denotes a worldview-type that can be found across different religions in the world of today. Specifically, the term denotes, as I will seek to demonstrate, a paradigm that paves the way for a shift in mentality from the relative harmlessness of an otherwise quaint, ultra-conservative – or in some *apropos* sense idiosyncratic relative to an orthodox ‘norm’ – religious belief system; to a religiously motivated and fanatically followed engagement in aggressively impositional, even terrorising, activity. Understanding the structure, logic, and implementation of this paradigm is, I suggest, of vital importance in the endeavour to create any meaningful counter terrorist capability able to address religiously motivated and sourced terrorism.

Fundamentalism

The term 'fundamentalism' and its usage arose in a uniquely Christian context, whence it has migrated into other arenas of discourse. A series of booklets, simply titled *The Fundamentals*, was published in America early in the twentieth-century to promote the view that there is a fundamental defining and non-negotiable set of traditional Christian doctrines. As a distinctive term, 'fundamentalism' arose to refer to the generic idea proposed by the publication of the booklets. In an age where theological liberalism had been in the ascendancy, a fresh term enabled a new countering viewpoint to be identified and promoted.ⁱⁱⁱ There was abroad the sense of needing to do battle royal for the fundamentals of the faith, and in this context the badge of fundamentalism was proudly worn. However, subsequent and wider application of the term has not been without problems and difficulties. It does not transfer well into religious contexts other than Christian, and it is imprecise enough even within the Christian camp. Nevertheless, it has gained wide coinage.

In a nutshell, 'fundamentalism' may be understood in terms of whatever it is 'against'. Often it is used as "a pejorative description for anyone who is regarded as having a closed mind with regard to a particular issue."^{iv} As a subject of critical academic scrutiny, fundamentalism, in its Christian context, has been the focus of a number of notable books and studies in the closing decades of the twentieth century.^v This has broadened out into studies on a wide-ranging front, inclusive of both religious and political variants of fundamentalism.^{vi} The five-year 'Fundamentalism Project' sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences has made a major contribution. This project commenced in 1987 and led, during the 90s, to the publication of several substantial volumes of research output.^{vii} More recently there have been a number of studies where the focus has been on Islamic fundamentalism.^{viii} The result of such academic development has been, among other things, to identify a number of generic elements or dimensions of fundamentalism *per se*. For example, Martin E. Marty observed that "fundamentalisms look backward and set out to 'freeze' some moment, some event, some text or texts from the past as the perfect place in time or space from which to measure" life in the present.^{ix} An imagined 'golden-age', believed to have pertained at the religion's foundation, is held up as the model and reference point for contemporary reality. In response to the critique that religion, and in particular fundamentalist religion, is but an epiphenomenon riding on what are really political ideas and actions, or that fundamentalism is really just a passing fad, such studies have only served to highlight what subsequent history and recent events underscore: that religious fundamentalism is a deeply rooted phenomenon that can give rise to, rather than itself relies upon, political acts.

One significant conclusion that arose from the Fundamentalism project was the recognition that fundamentalists

"fear loss and change through whatever serves to relativize the world and their worlds. There is constant fear of pluralism, or the stranger who brings other ways which may be alluring or threatening. ... Pluralism confuses; it presents not only the threatening but also

the attractive neighbour at hand, and that could lead to loss of identity in a group."^x

Furthermore, far from being archaic and fossilised, fundamentalist movements are instead “lively, intense, creative”, setting out to make a difference, indeed to change the world.^{xi} Religious fundamentalism can imply a narrow, strict and limited metaphysics and set of doctrines, which to a greater or lesser degree hardly impinge on the wider life of a society; it can mean a worldview perspective that engenders, if not demands, the advocacy of a socio-political ordering and action to achieve an intended outcome. There is nothing startlingly new about that, of course. But the key difference between religiously-driven political actions today, in contrast with any previous point in history, is the pervasive context of globalisation. Instead of localised and regional levels of action, the technology and mentality of a globalized world now allow for a degree of internationalisation of the ideologies and activities of fundamentalist movements as never before.

Fundamentalism and Islam

Bassam Tibi, an outspoken critic of much of contemporary Islam, was one of the researchers involved in the American Fundamentalism Project. Islamic fundamentalism, he says,

"strongly rejects (the) spirit of religious pluralism, dismissing it as a heresy threatening the neo-absolutist claim for the dominance of political Islam throughout the world. The intellectual father of Islamic fundamentalism, Sayyid Qutb who inspired Bin Laden, was also the one who claimed an Islamic world order to replace the present one. Fundamentalism is not only an intellectual challenge, it is a challenge to security inasmuch as it proposes to topple the existing order. ... The challenge (is) a very concrete one posed and practiced by ... *jihad*-fighters willing to sacrifice their lives."^{xii}

Tibi further asserts: “There is a real challenge of fundamentalism as a threat that results in creating disorder. This challenge is not only posed to the West and to its civilization, but also to decent Muslims – men and women – who suffer the intolerance and totalitarian views and practices of the Islamists”.^{xiii} However, he views fundamentalism *per se* as primarily, if not solely, a political phenomenon that is first and foremost “an aggressive politicization of religion undertaken in the pursuit of nonreligious ends”. Thus, in his view, fundamentalism is only secondly and “superficially a form of terrorism or extremism”. Nevertheless he issues a salutary warning:

"In the long run the Islamic fundamentalists are far more dangerous as ideologues of power than as extremists who kill ... Fundamentalism is a *Weltanschauung*, or worldview, that seeks to establish its own order, and thus to separate the peoples of Islamic civilization from the rest of humanity while claiming for their worldview a universal standing. ... Islamic fundamentalists challenge and undermine the secular order of the body politic and aim to replace it with a divine order ... Certainly Islamic fundamentalists will not be able to impose their “order” on the world, but they *can* create *disorder*, on a vast scale."^{xiv}

Tibi views religious fundamentalism as a generic politicization of religion. Thus, in effect, he views fundamentalism as but one variety of a relatively new global phenomenon in international politics. He states:

"I identify religious fundamentalism not as a spiritual faith, but as a political ideology based on the politicizing of religion for sociopolitical and economic goals in the pursuit of establishing a divine order. ... this ideology is exclusive, in the sense that it attacks opposing options, primarily those secular outlooks that resist the linking of religion to politics."^{xv}

For him it is a political ideology, not the religion linked with the ideology, which is the point at issue. But it is the advocated assumption of a deep dichotomy between religion and politics which is problematic for much religious fundamentalism generally, and certainly for Islamic fundamentalism. Islam, broadly speaking, has ever championed an inherent linking of religion and politics: the necessary symbiosis of Islam as religion and Islam as civilization is the default position which Tibi seems to be overlooking. Certainly, as himself a devout Muslim, Tibi is deeply concerned about the identification of Islam, *per se*, with fundamentalism: "Islam as a religion is definitely not a threat, but Islamic fundamentalism is".^{xvi} He is thus most concerned about the blurring of the distinction between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in the media: "it is important to not only distinguish clearly between the two but also to make clear that the phenomenon [that is, religious fundamentalism as such] is not restricted to the Islamic world".^{xvii}

Tibi sees current Islamic fundamentalism as an outgrowth of tensions that hold between the secular worldview of western cultural modernity and the monotheistic worldview of Islam. It is these tensions which can become a source of international socio-political conflict. Nevertheless it is an interpretation and application of religious sources that predominate in the forming of Islamist ideologies, and Tibi acknowledges that. As he notes, "In their writings ... Islamic fundamentalists present themselves as true scripturalists, though they invoke the scriptures in a highly selective manner".^{xviii} Furthermore, such Muslim fundamentalists, he argues, "are not traditionalists; their ideal is the selectively perceived and arbitrarily purified state of seventh-century Islam".^{xix} That Islamic fundamentalists go beyond the Qur'an is given credence by an Egyptian example of a fundamentalist sheikh, or legal scholar, a "renowned authority on the Islamic concept of human rights" who declared in a *fatwah* of June 1993 – published in a London-based Arabic newspaper – that "every Muslim who pleads for the suspension of the *shari'a* is an apostate and can be killed. The killing of those apostates cannot be prosecuted under Islamic law because this killing is justified".^{xx} However, nowhere in the Qur'an is there support for such a *fatwah*. "The command to slay reasoning Muslims is un-Islamic, an invention of Islamic fundamentalists".^{xxi} Tibi's critique is trenchant and far-ranging, although he does tend to gloss the religious basis and component of Islamic fundamentalist ideology. In the end I think he provides an example of the critical scholar who yet underplays the religious dimension. I suggest it is the ideology of *religious* fundamentalism as such that needs to be addressed if there is to be any sustained successful counter to the

contemporary threat of Islamist terrorism, or indeed of any terrorism that arises out of, or in conjunction with, a particular religious milieu.

Fundamentalism and Islamist Terrorism

What 9/11, the subsequent bombings in Madrid, and more recently London 7/7, have revealed is that suicide-bombing Muslims, enacting out their warped jihad, are by no means the poor, oppressed, and dispossessed of this world. Whatever their lot in life they have been well educated for the most part; they have had sufficient affluence to travel with impunity; they have had access to sophisticated technology. Indeed, in the aftermath of the London bombings there is increasing evidence of the recruitment of affluent middle class Muslims in British universities to the radical Islamist cause. A joint Home Office and Foreign Office dossier on Young Muslims and Extremism places likely recruits in two categories: those well educated, especially in the engineering and IT (Information Technology) fields,^{xxiii} together with those who may not be unintelligent, but who have emerged in their youth as underachievers, often having already come to the attention of authorities in relation to criminal activities.^{xxiii}

Furthermore, the report claims that young professionals from privileged backgrounds, as well as students, “have become involved in extremist politics and even terrorism”. Such young Muslim men have enjoyed all the benefits and opportunities of the contemporary globalized industrialised world. These are not the warrior peasants of old, intent on sweeping out the corrupt and decayed administrations in order to inaugurate a renewal of their society. There may have been an echo of that ancient Islamic paradigm motivating Pashtun tribesman of the Taliban. It is most certainly not the agenda of an al Qaeda terrorist cell. Extreme actions are not being called for in the name of a societal reformation and the overthrow of evil. Rather evil is being employed for no more reason, practically speaking, than a cruelly quixotic tilting at the windmill of Western society *per se*. As Johann Hari remarked of the July 2005 London bombers, they “were not poor, they were not persecuted, they were not personally humiliated”.^{xxiv} For Hari, any explanation of their actions can only lie in “the extraordinary power of political ideas”. But the political dimension is clearly embedded in the religious, as Hari implies: “With one leap of faith ... they were soldiers in the International Jihad, doing the work of Allah himself to liberate Muslim peoples across the world.”^{xxv}

A template for this can be found in the three-way relationship between Britain, Pakistan and globalized Islamism. Muslims from England have been active in various Pakistan-based militant groups, engaged in a jihad in Kashmir, since the early 90s; the Kashmiri-focussed groups – whose jihad is against Indian occupation of Kashmir – later in the 90s established links with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Significantly, the clue to this linking is found in the shared Deobandi ideology of an “ultra-conservative strand” of Sunni Islam that in turn has links to the hard-line Wahhabi ideology emanating from Saudi Arabia. From this it is evident that some of these initially quite locally-focussed groups, in terms of the outworking of jihad, have now been linked to international terrorism: jihad is thus globalized, by virtue of the logic of extending jihad beyond a local context

together with applying the logic of an ultra-conservative and militant form of Islam. Further, as the *Observer* report that discusses this development notes, modern globalized militancy works by way of “a long chain of personal and organisational associations”.^{xxvi} Thus the difficulty in identifying and locating – let alone rooting out – potential terrorist groups before they act: there are few overt institutional or structural elements whereby such potential terrorists can be identified.

The implication, of course, is that the first component in any countering strategy has to be in respect to identifying, and addressing, ideological rhetoric and elements within communities from which potential terrorists are likely to come, and by which they are likely to be nourished. The war on terror is a war of ideology; in particular, it is a war against the dominance of certain religious fundamentalisms. Of course, by virtue of being “extremists”, the individuals who carry out terrorist atrocities are properly disowned by the community of faith with which they are otherwise identified. Their actions are condemned as un-Islamic, as contrary to Quranic dictate, and inimical to normative Islam. Alongside this rejection of aberrant behaviour there is also a direct and outright denial by some – possibly many – from within the Muslim community of any Islamic link to the situation in the first place. Attempts to redirect responsibility elsewhere, including claiming the attacks were the work of America or Israel, are not unknown. Such paradoxical and absolute denial of Islamically-driven terrorism, by Muslims, is based on an ideological stance which goes, in effect: “Given that such terrorism harms Muslims and besmirches Islam, any true Muslim could not possibly commit it.” This line of thought surfaced after the 9/11 attacks when a Muslim mentality of denial led to rumours of Jewish conspiracy theories as the root cause and not Islamic disaffection, let alone an Islamic ideology as such. Straws of denial and deflection are being desperately clutched at by some. As Waleed Aly remarks:

"An emotive confusion drives denial and this is demonstrated by the inconsistency of the reasoning that accompanies it. Too often, those who deny that Muslims are in any way responsible for terrorism also blame a belligerent Western foreign policy towards Muslim nations for the terrorist backlash. Such Orwellian doublethink destroys the necessary credibility to inspire honest engagement."^{xxvii}

On the one hand there is a refusal, on ideological grounds, to believe fellow-Muslims could even commit such acts of terrorism; on the other hand Islamic extremists will target Muslim and non-Muslim alike on equally ideological grounds. One result is that the many moderate and peace-loving Muslims in western secularised communities “are just angry and tired of being held hostage by the acts of other Muslims”.^{xxviii} So what is driving contemporary globalized Islamic extremism and terrorism? Is it just a contemporary socio-political aberration in a religious guise? Are these little more than the anarchists of our age?

The joint report, referred to above, noted that among likely candidates for anarchic terrorist cells of the present-day Muslim variety are “loners” who gravitate to ethnic or religious university clubs, or the like, and who also clearly register “disillusionment with their current existence”. The issue at

this level is not with the clubs as such, but with the possible psychological profile of certain of their members. Neither of these variables, even taken together, would help to identify a potential suicide-bomber. However, the report goes on to identify the rhetoric of communal disillusionment as a third factor, noting in particular the oft-repeated disapproving response to the double standard attributed to “the foreign policy of western governments, in particular Britain and the US”. This may provide the prospect of a more obvious measure of discontent, except that there are many mainstream Christian Churches and their congregations which express similar critiques, cater for ethnic identities, are by definition ‘religious clubs’, and very often encourage ‘loners’ into their midst. Identifying a religious extremism inclining to criminal activity is not going to be easy.

Arguably, when the matter of attending to public discourse is pressed, a potential measure of the propensity to terrorism can be identified in terms of a scrutiny of certain forms of Muslim rhetoric, namely when there is unequivocal advocacy of the view that, vis-à-vis an Islamic context, ‘passive oppression’ – as evidenced within the UK, for example, by a foreign policy of non-action in Kashmir or Chechnya – has been eclipsed by an intentional ‘active oppression’ against Muslims and Islam. That is to say, in regards to the advocating rhetoric, military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the so-called ‘war on terror’, or whatever else may be deemed to express ‘active oppression’, may be taken by Muslims as, indeed, acts perpetrated against Islam *per se*. Acts against Muslims in a specific context are interpreted as acts conducted against Islam generally and universally, thereby calling forth and legitimating, *qua* the logic and rhetoric of jihad, an aggressive Islamic response. Where such rhetoric of advocacy and argumentation is fomented there may well be a case for pre-emptive countering action on the part of the authorities concerned. The problem, of course, is that such action only reinforces the rhetoric.

It is certainly the case that Muslim tendencies to reform and modernise that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have been eclipsed, in recent decades, by the rise of Islamism, and more latterly by globalized and internationalized Islamic extremism. Islamists assert Islam as a revolutionary idea and programme with the aim of utterly destroying the social structure of the world in order to build it anew. Jihad is thus revolutionary combat in a transcendent cause. In the view of such an extremist perspective, Islam is not a matter of optional belief but is inherently a total and totalising socio-ideological system. Thus, the message of Islam is believed to have been addressed to all humankind. For the Islamist, this means every person who believes in the message becomes, *ipso facto*, a member of the ‘Islamic party’ or the ‘party of God’, which is engaged in an inherent struggle to put in place a new civilisation explicitly based on the ‘word of God’. This is the essence of the paradigm that has motivated the pattern, found throughout Islamic history, of popular overthrow of Muslim governments deemed corrupt and un-Islamic: jihad is taken up as a tool of social salvation; deep disaffection finds resolution in assertive jihadic action. Jihad is viewed as a Muslim liberation struggle to be engaged in on multiple fronts, and terrorism becomes a legitimate tool of jihad. Or so the logic, born of the rhetoric, can go. And so religious terrorism derives from an ideology of religious fundamentalism. One political correspondent, writing in the aftermath of the 2005 London bombings, seemed to get the point when he noting that, rather than taking up arms

in the so-called “war against terrorism”, the real issue has to do with the “battle to discredit an ideology ... it is an idea that caused the attack, and it is the idea that must be undermined”.^{xxix} And another *Observer* report noted that authorities are intent on “examining literature for clues to the precise ideology” that may have inspired the bombers.^{xxx} Investigations are said to have revealed that as far back as January 2005 there was mounting concern within the young men’s own Muslim communities that their hardening fundamentalist and extremist attitudes and opinions were taking them far beyond the pale of normative Islam. Indeed, they had been ostracised and told they were not welcome in certain mosques because of their advocacy of “inappropriate teachings”. Their “increasing fundamentalism” had estranged them from their own. Yet, local Muslim acquaintances could not foresee the possibility of terrorist action, suggesting that there is as yet a very real difficulty for religious people to understand the range of ideological options, and the significance of the shifts that occur in an individual’s ideological stance, from within a given religion. This appears acutely the case for Muslim communities right now, but should in no way be deemed a uniquely Muslim issue.

Religious Fundamentalism as a paradigm for terrorism

Fundamentalism is both a specifically focussed mindset and a certain kind of narrow worldview, a *modus operandi*, which can apply to just about any sphere of human activity, but especially so to religion and politics, for both are concerned with the context and aims of human existence. Fundamentalism, as a framework phenomenon that applies across more than just one religion, and which can be applied also to other non-religious spheres of human commitment and worldview, is marked, I suggest, by at least twelve key factors. Others may be adduced, but these twelve, and the way they are interconnected, need to be carefully understood. For it is these features, collectively and cumulatively that, I contend, move a fundamentalist mindset from the quirky to the critical, from atavism to aggression, from benign eccentricity to socially endangering activity. The factors comprise six sets of paired features, and it is the particular sequential combination which is important, not just the factors themselves.

Set 1 – Principal Presuppositions:

(i) *Perspectival Absolutism* and (ii) *Immediate Inerrancy*

A fundamentalist perspective is inherently absolutist: all other relevant phenomena are explained on its terms or viewed in a relativising way with reference to it. Fundamentalism, as a mindset, is first and foremost a mentality that expresses the modernist project writ large: only one truth; one authority; one authentic narrative that accounts for all; one right way to be. And, of course, that way is my way, declares the fundamentalist. Further, a fundamentalist perspective deems itself privileged in respect to this absolutism, for it implies superiority of knowledge and truth. Indeed, this is inherent to holding an absolutist perspective as such. Absolutism of outlook or worldview is a mark of fundamentalism, but not of itself a signal of potential terror.

Allied to absolutism is the view that the grounding text – be it political manifesto or holy writ – is to be read as conveying an immediate truth or value, without error; that is, it is inherently or effectively inerrant. However, the assertion of the immediate inerrancy of the text – namely reading the text as being immediately applicable and providing a non-mediated access to ultimate or divine truth – in fact involves an implicit assertion that there is only one normative interpretive reading allowed: that which is undertaken through the fundamentalist's lens. Now a fundamentalist's presumption of textual immediacy and inerrancy is, of course, but one interpretive option. Nevertheless, from the fundamentalist perspective, alternative and variant interpretations are deemed inherently false or heretical, and so are rejected: there can only ever be one truth, one verity, one valid interpretation.

So far as religion is concerned, these two interconnected factors – perspectival absolutism and immediate inerrancy – comprise the foundational or principal presuppositions of a religious fundamentalism that, on their own, might simply indicate little more than one among many options for the expression of religious belief. Most often a secularist, an agnostic, or a religious liberal in the West would view these factors to be the essence of fundamentalism: an atavistic expression of religious thought, a quirky mindset, a rather odd out-of-step religious mentality; easily ignored, best avoided, of no consequence or significance in the greater scheme of things. But, I contend, this is not all there is to fundamentalism.

Set 2 – Authority Derivation:

(iii) *Apodictic assumption* and (iv) *Narrow Narrative Indwelling*

Building directly upon the preceding set, the third and fourth factors together constitute the basis of authority claimed by fundamentalism as such, namely, in the first instance, the assumption that the authority source, most usually textual (though not necessarily scriptural: together with the relevant scripture there are many other possibilities of textual sources upon which a fundamentalist might rely), is unambiguous, thus requiring no interposing hermeneutic. This is sometimes understood in terms of 'literalism', but for a fundamentalist the key issue is that the authority of the text is such that no intermediary interpretive framework is required – the text itself provides pellucid expression of truth, whether in terms of an abstract universal, or in respect to a pragmatic or programmatic articulation of the values and views espoused by the fundamentalist *as* the truth. This provides the authorisation underlying the preceding presupposition of immediate inerrancy.

Paradoxically, of course, any so-called 'literalist' reading, or regarding a text as not requiring intentional hermeneutical application, is itself a modality of interpretation, namely a fundamentalist one. It is often assumed, by a fundamentalist, that a 'direct' reading of the text can be made so as to avoid the murky waters of interpretation. That is to say, there is no need to apply any sort of intellectual critique or scrutiny of the text: meaning can be immediately read off; the text at hand is clear in its composition; the message conveyed by the text is apodictic. Not so. The fundamentalist makes the assumption that meaning and truth can be directly read without recourse to a frame of meaning that supplies a key to understanding. Again, not so: every fundamentalist reading of the

Bible, the *Qur'an*, or whatever, necessarily requires a prior-held framework of understanding about the nature of the text and the meanings of the key terms and concepts employed.

Nevertheless, allied to the assumption of apodicticity is the factor of narrow narrative indwelling. Arguably all religious people 'indwell', to a greater or lesser degree, their respective religious narrative. The life references, points of meaning, and various frameworks of understanding which inform a religious individual's existence are more often than not traceable to the paradigms, models, values etc that are given within the religious narrative – both the scriptural record as well as ancillary histories/stories and so forth – than derived from the intellectual ratiocination of doctrine and dogma. Where the narrative base is broad, the religious life that indwells therein likewise reflects breadth. But where the base is narrow, the resultant indwelt religious life is correspondingly confined. So, I suggest, in the case of fundamentalism a distinguishing factor has to do with the narrowness of narrative indwelling that is manifest. It is, indeed, this very narrowness which often marks a fundamentalist out from the wider religious tradition and community that might otherwise be regarded as conservative, for example.

Set 3 – Contextual Scope:

(v) *Ideological Exclusivism* and (vi) *Polity Inclusivism*

Fundamentalism's third set includes two factors which, in their apparent paradoxical juxtaposition, yield the scope of the context of fundamentalism. The first is ideological exclusivism wherein, because there is only one reading, only one interpretation, of the grounding text allowed, the ideological view expressed therein, or built thereon, is inevitably an exclusive one. No competing or variant ideological view is granted credibility. A fundamentalist perspective will exclude, virtually automatically, anything that relative to it appears 'liberal', that is, that admits of, for example, any limitation, provisionality, otherness, openness or change. Religious fundamentalism excludes religious liberalism. Similarly, secular fundamentalism often excludes religion *per se* on the same sorts of grounds. Ideological exclusivism works in multiple directions.

But alongside this exclusivity there may be discerned, somewhat paradoxically, as a sixth factor to fundamentalism, a form of inclusion, namely polity inclusion. This refers to the propensity to include, in respect to considerations of the policies and praxis of social organisation, all others that fall within the fundamentalist's frame of reference or worldview understanding. This may still appear innocuous, especially if the fundamentalists concerned are a minor or marginalised group in terms of the wider society in which they exist, or where such an inclusivist stance finds a more benign setting within a normative or orthodox religious tradition. Nevertheless, in terms of the paradigm analysis I am here pursuing, the fundamentalist for whom polity inclusiveness is a primary element is now poised to become activist – to act on this inclusivism in terms of polity, whether covertly (as in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints vicariously baptising the dead) or overtly (as in the Taliban's insistence that everyone in Afghanistan live according to their application Islam, and variations on this theme found currently in parts of Pakistan and Nigeria).

So, the apparent paradox of fundamentalism evincing both exclusivism and inclusivism as two of its core features is resolved. Excluding all other ideological variants and perspectives necessarily implies the wholesale inclusion of a society in terms of the outworking of polity considerations. Thus, for example, the fundamentalism of a resurgent Islamist perspective naturally insists not just that all Muslims should live according to Islamic Law, but that all members of the society in question, irrespective of religion, should likewise submit to this Law Code – understood, of course, to transcend human values and codes by virtue of being “God’s law”. The imperative force of this element of fundamentalism means that all are expected automatically to submit – or be made so to do. We hear of this call being made by activists from time to time in different parts of the Islamic world; we may find some variant expressions of it closer to home, if only albeit wistfully, or merely in principle, entertained.

Set 4 – Implicit Verification:

(vii) *Narrative Correlation* and (viii) *Rhetorical Corroboration*

Principal presuppositions granted, the derivation of authority established, and the contextual scope adumbrated, the evolving fundamentalist perspective begins now to move from a variant conservative expression of a religious worldview to a more intentional advocacy of religious outlook as being, *par excellence*, the expression of authenticity and truth applicable for all. This comes about, initially, with the deepening of the correlation between the religious narrative espoused and the reality, or *sitz-im-leben*, of the religious community concerned. Any phenomenology of religion will be able to articulate some such measure of narrative correlation as an otherwise quite normal feature of religion as such. That is to say, normatively speaking a religion will proffer some degree of correlation between its narrative and the ‘real world’ in which the followers of the religion live – otherwise religion would reduce to a simple and obvious fairy-tale superimposed upon the ‘real’ world, or set aside from it. However, a distinction can be made between the broader traditions of a religion whose narrative correlation will be relatively loose, flexible or at least provisional, and the fundamentalist whose degree of correlation will be that much greater and intense. Indeed this factor sharpens – and is prefaced by – the elements of absolutism and inerrancy as adumbrated above. For a fundamentalist the correlation will be such as to yield an unambiguous outcome – America *is* the Great Satan, ontologically, for example – whereas, for a non-fundamentalist critical of the West, America may be deemed or judged satanic in a more general way. The difference is one of the supposed degrees of correlation between the religious narrative and the external realities of the world in which the fundamentalist lives.

Allied, clearly, to the factor of narrative correlation is that of rhetorical corroboration. Here the discourse of fundamentalism can be readily tested. For in the articulation of narrative correlation there is likely to found a corresponding intensification of a corroborating rhetoric that situates, endorses, and justifies the fundamentalist perspective vis-à-vis the judgements and assessments made about the external world in terms of narrative correlation. Rhetoric will be sharp and self-

affirming; judgements will be clear and reflective of both the correlation factor as well as the corroboration factor. Thus the perspective of the fundamentalist derives implicit verification and the scene is set for the next step, namely the application of the values espoused from out of the fundamentalist's narrative.

Set 5 – Value Application:

(ix) *Otherness Negated* and (x) *Self-Superiority Asserted*

At this stage in the development of a fundamentalist's outlook the sense of self-affirmation and confidence is such that the values of fundamentalism are actively and intentionally applied. And these values are primarily two: the negation of otherness or alterity *per se*, and the corresponding assertion of self-superiority over all opponents, real and putative. The negation of otherness is perhaps critical at this juncture for the scene set by the third set of factors – contextualising exclusivism and inclusivism – now emerge into a devaluing and dismissal of the 'other', whether in terms of rival community or competing alterities, ideological or otherwise. Indeed, such alterities may be – and in fact often are – demonised. The religiously 'other' on this view is often cast as 'satanic', or at least seriously and significantly labelled as a hostile opponent, and so hostilely regarded.

In the process of negating the other, the self is asserted as inherently superior. My God is greater than your god. My Truth reigns over your ignorance. The authenticity of my faith contrasts with the feeble delusion you entertain. My laws express the divine reality directly which is infinitely superior to the laws which derive merely from human ideas. The salvation offered by my faith is the real thing by contrast to the lost way that you proclaim. And so we might go on. However it is expressed or referenced, it will be clear enough that the fundamentalist is applying the key value set of negativity to 'otherness' and a corresponding assertion of self-superiority. The scene is now well set for the sixth and final set of factors I have analysed as the components of the paradigm of fundamentalism – the rendering of an explicit justification not just for a viewpoint but also for actions premised on that viewpoint.

Set 6 – Explicit Justification:

(xi) *Sanctioned Imposition* and (xii) *Legitimated Extremism*

It should be clear that, once the preceding sets of factors are in operation, it is but a short step to the final two, which denote the expression of fundamentalism in some form of direct socio-political action. For the eleventh factor sees the very imposition of the fundamentalist's views and polity as, in fact, sanctioned by a higher or greater authority – whether that authority is conceived in terms of deity or the dynamics of historical necessity, or whatever. This reference transcends the local, particular, ordinary taken-for-granted freedoms of everyday life with the requirement to be, live and act, in accord with the fundamentalist's ideological dictates.

The sanctioning of the imposition of the fundamentalist's programme leads naturally to the twelfth and final factor of this analysis: extremist action is now legitimated. Once there is in place a sense of transcendent sanction for programmatic action, the way to the legitimising of extreme behaviours in order to achieve the requisite outcomes, is eased. Japanese *kamikaze* pilots and Palestinian suicide bombers are two examples – now 'classical' in terms of recent history – of the outworking of the features of fundamentalism that culminate in extreme actions. More complexly, as we have recently seen in Afghanistan, not only was it the case that all good Muslims ought to submit naturally to the *Shari'a*, according to the fundamentalist ideals of the Taliban, but indeed all of society should be made to submit, like it or not, for impositional submission is an inherent element of Islamic extremism. Submission to the dictates of the fundamentalist is at this juncture a matter of necessary imposition, as Afghani women found to their cost, for example. And the alternative to even an involuntary submission is outright destruction: hence, from the Taliban's fundamentalist perspective, the Buddha 'idols' had to be destroyed. How else does the fundamentalist ensure that the imposition that has been sanctioned can actually be effected? Sanctioned imposition and legitimated extremism are the two sides of the one coin in the currency of terror.

Conclusion

Fundamentalism is not simply a religious or political option in terms of belief perspective. It is a package-deal phenomenon marked by a sequence of factors whose cumulative impact can be devastating. The Taliban, to return to this example of extreme Islamist fundamentalism, took an absolutist, inerrant and exclusivist line with respect to religious identity and behaviour, which was extended to include all who were within their purview – namely, the inhabitants of Afghanistan. Actions taken to effect their aims were deemed sanctioned by the highest authority – *Allah* – and their extreme measures were in consequence deemed legitimated. Thus no opposition was brooked; all had to submit and obey, or face the consequences.

Whether political or religious, of local or global scope, fundamentalism is a phenomenon to be seriously reckoned with. Religious fundamentalism, in the form of contemporary Islamism, is the seedbed of Islamic extremism and terrorism. To the extent my analysis of the paradigm of religious fundamentalism *per se* is in any way apposite and accurate, and to the extent that empirical evidence – for example from speeches, pamphlets etc. – can be adduced, from any given situation, such that there is a clear correlation with the above paradigmatic factors, then I suggest that the analysis provides a basis, at least, for an empirical measure for the detection, and so hopefully countering, extremist religious fundamentalism – Islamic as well as any other – likely to lead to terrorist activity. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly in the long run, such a paradigm analysis may assist in the task of tackling the ideology of Islamist extremism head-on. A war on terror is inherently unwinnable as a military exercise. It requires a change in mindset, in worldview, brought about by a shift in religious ideology, if the likelihood of terrorism emerging from within any religious community is to be successfully countered. Unmasking the underlying ideological framework of an extreme religious fundamentalism is the first step in formulating a countering

ideology; developing it is a demanding challenge of interreligious and intercultural dialogical engagement.

Literature and Notes:

- i. This is an expanded version of a paper entitled 'Religious Fundamentalism: A paradigm for terrorism?' given to the National Counter Terrorism Capability Seminar, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, in August 2005.
- ii. A very useful recent discussion can be found in Peter Antes, 'New Approaches to the Study of the New Fundamentalisms', in Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, Randi R. Warne, eds., *New Approaches to the Study of Religion, Volume I: Regional, Critical and Historical Approaches* (Religion and Reason, Vol. 42, Jacques Waardenburg, Series Editor); Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004, 437-449.
- iii. See Martin E. Marty, *Fundamentalisms Compared: The Charles Strong Memorial Lecture 1989*, Underdale, South Australia: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1989, 8.
- iv. Bryan Gilling, ed., "Be Ye Separate": fundamentalism and the New Zealand experience, Red Beach: Colcom Press, 1992, xi.
- v. See for example Ernest R. Sandeen, *The roots of fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970; James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, London: SCM Press, 1977; George M. Marsden, *Understanding fundamentalism and evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991; John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from fundamentalism*, San Francisco, Ca.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.
- vi. See for example Santosh C. Saha, ed., *Religious fundamentalism in the contemporary world: critical social and political issues*, Lanham MD.: Lexington Books, 2004; Lionel Caplan, *Studies in religious fundamentalism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987; Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: the fundamentalist revolt against the modern age*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989; David Westerlund, *Questioning the Secular State: the worldwide resurgence of religion in politics*, London: Hurst, 1996; Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: the resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the modern world*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994; Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur, eds., *Religious fundamentalism and political extremism*, Portland, OR.: Frank Cass, 2004.
- vii. See Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *The Fundamentalism Project*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; - *Fundamentalisms observed*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; - *Fundamentalisms and the State: remaking politics, economies, and militance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; - *Accounting for fundamentalisms: the dynamic character of movements*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; - *Fundamentalisms comprehended*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- viii. See for example Joseph E. B. Lumbard, ed., *Islam, fundamentalism, and the betrayal of tradition*. Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2004; Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic fundamentalism since 1945*, New York: Routledge, 2005; Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: political Islam and the new world disorder*, Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2002; Mahmud A. Faksh, *The future of Islam in the Middle East: fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997; Ahmad Mawsilili, *Moderate and radical Islamic fundamentalism: the quest for modernity, legitimacy, and the Islamic State*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999; Mansoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof, eds., *Contemporary debates in Islam: an anthology of modernist and fundamentalist thought*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2004; Lawrence Davidson, *Islamic fundamentalism: an introduction*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003.

- ix. Martin E. Marty, *Fundamentalisms Compared*, 1.
- x. Ibid, 7.
- xi. Ibid, 8.
- xii. Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*. Updated Edition. Los Angeles, University of California Press: 2002, iv.
- xiii. Ibid, xxii.
- xiv. Ibid, xxvii.
- xv. Ibid, 20.
- xvi. Ibid, 3.
- xvii. Ibid, 14 – material in parenthesis added for clarity of meaning.
- xviii. Ibid, 143.
- xix. Ibid
- xx. Ibid, 155.
- xxi. Ibid
- xxii. The prevalence of engineering and IT education raises interesting questions about the link between the mindsets of these disciplines and the mindset of fundamentalism, and the predilection for imposed solutions.
- xxiii. As reported by London Correspondents in *The Australian*, Monday July 11, 2005, p. 13.
- xxiv. *New Zealand Herald*, Saturday July 16, 2005, p. A2.
- xxv. *New Zealand Herald*, Saturday July 16, 2005, p. A2.
- xxvi. As cited in the *New Zealand Herald*, Wednesday July 20, 2005, p. B2.
- xxvii. *The Australian*, Wednesday July 13, 2005, p. 13.
- xxviii. Waleed Aly, *The Australian*, Wednesday July 13, 2005, p. 13.
- xxix. Johann Hari, *New Zealand Herald*, Saturday July 16, 2005, p. A2.
- xxx. As reported in the *New Zealand Herald*, July 19, 2005, p. B2.

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